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**Indian Vernacular History-writing and Its Ideological Engagement:  
A Contemporary Account on Shivaji's Visit to Agra (1666)  
in Brajbhāṣā Verse**

**SUMMARY:** The visit of Shivaji Bhosle at Aurangzeb's court in 1666 is a famous subject of modern historical and popular accounts. A contemporary relation of this event is to be found in vernacular poetry, which according to the Western understanding of traditional history should not be considered factually reliable. Academic research of at least the last two decades has seen many attempts to oppose this view and to theorize Indian vernacular literatures as legitimate ways of recording the past. This article offers an analysis of a few 17<sup>th</sup>-century Braj stanzas by Bhushan against the background of modern professional historical accounts, all of them devoted to the 1666 event, in order to demonstrate intersection points between two separately molded ways of intentional history-writing and to support the credibility of recording the past by the early modern poet.

**KEYWORDS:** Śivājī, Shivaji, Bhūṣaṇ, Bhushan, Śivrājbhūṣaṇ, history-writing, vernacular, courtly Brajbhāṣā poetry

Our scholarly quest for history in India is a showcase of the Eurocentric attitude that has prevailed within world-academia. And that can never be completely erased—think for instance of de Certeau's historian, who cannot circumvent his social milieu and institutional conditioning.

As in West-dominated history-writing, “the past is conceptualized and presented according to what happened on the provincial scale of Europe (...) and then imposed upon the rest of the world” (Goody 2006: 1), in academic endeavors history has long remained an infeasible, almost tangible component of civilization. A reliable account of this quest would become a history of misunderstanding and stereotypes, power and domination, inferiority or superiority complex and of intellectual tenets. However, each of many ways of understanding the term “history” is legitimate up to some point. For instance, it is right to state that India does not have history, or rather did not have it until late colonial times, if we think of it as a field of archival or scholarly investigation. It might seem that substituting the term historical consciousness for history would change the game, but this is not the case. As Sandhya Sharma justifies her search for history in early modern Braj literature:

(i)t was generally held that the skill of history writing amongst Indians and their consciousness of the past evolved as they encountered the West in the nineteenth century. Even those historians who attempted to explore the possibilities of history in vernaculars could at best write ‘quasi history’. (Sharma 2011: 158)

Along with consciousness, the presence of a sense of history in pre-colonial India has been equally disputable. According to Arvind Sharma, who even provides a complex classification of existing opinions on the lack of history,

(...) the view that Hinduism as a religion, or the Hindus as a people, lack a sense of history has been expressed so often as to have become a cliché. Even when scholars have tried to make a more sophisticated as opposed to a clichéd view, the effect has often been to reinforce it. (Sharma 2003b: 1)

Leaving aside the reasons for such denial, a person even superficially acquainted with Indian intellectual traditions may now find it hard

to assume that Indians were ever indifferent to the past. They made use of it according to the patterns of their own systems of knowledge and literatures. Vernacular literature to which Sharma refers above offers an enormous field of research in such history at large. Recent decades provide successful attempts to identify and describe ways of recording and using the past by Indians of the early modern period. For a productive theorization of what should be seen as historical composition in South Asia especially noteworthy is the milestone work by Velcheru Narayan Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam *Textures of Time* (Rao et al. 2001), vividly discussed in academia (e.g. Mantena 2007, Pollock 2007). The authors offer numerous case studies drawn from South Indian literary cultures. For Braj literature the works by Allison Busch are exemplary (e.g. Busch 2005, 2012, 2014). She covered various patterns by which vernacular poets in 16<sup>th</sup>- and early 17<sup>th</sup>-century North India dealt with contemporary political history. As it became obvious through her case studies, literary compositions that she had put under scrutiny turned out to be intentionally imbued with the past. The past forms an important, if not central, point of interest of poets, who shape its images in tune with their professional agendas. Had the presence of history in those compositions been claimed half a century ago or earlier, it would have obviously raised voices of protest for many reasons. The loudest one would be for lack of objectivity, another one for encountered mixture of myth and reality, yet another for genre, for lack of chronology, etc. By now, the viability of such opinions has been undermined by the post-modernist reflection on history-writing, from Hayden White's critical analysis of historical prose discourse, the narrativist theory of history, and in the specific case of India, the above-mentioned Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam. Touching the problem of the literary form of historical composition, they "propose that history is written in the dominant literary genre of a particular community, located in space, at a given moment in time" (Rao et al. 2001: 5). For someone who would still voice an Eurocentric opinion that historical composition should be distinct from belles-lettres, the authors of *Textures of Time*, in the mid

of their analyses, answer that there in India, or at least in some literary cultures of the South:

the sifting of sources and work of judgment and integration take place offstage—never as a part of the historiographical document itself. It is as if the historical work has to be presented as a completed aesthetic whole, as part of an accepted literary genre with its own formal features, rather than an edifice that reveals its own scaffolding. (Rao et al. 2001: 96)

The poet-historian I focus on in this paper belonged to a literary culture in which revealing such scaffolding would probably mean losing—if not a job, then at least authority, otherwise necessary for successful reception of history-writing there and then. Within the courtly literary culture of Braj, during its mature stage of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, a poet who was a member of the elite literary circle *kavikul* (see e.g. Busch 2011: 188–201) proved his professional proficiency and fitness by employing the signature literary genre (cf. Busch 2015: 249) of the *rīti*-style of Hindi literature, which is *rītigranth* or *lakṣaṇ-granth*. One may say that the visibility of scaffolding was required but on a different layer of composition. The rhetorical figures had to be named and defined (*lakṣaṇ*), and the purported sense of the oeuvre had to be placed in the so-called illustrations (*udahāraṇ*) or examples of use of those figures. Some of the poets found it necessary, or rather must have been commissioned, to imbue their examples with historical content. One such poetical treatise by Bhushan Tripathi (Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī, 1613–1715) survived until our times, even as part of Hindi literary canon (see e.g. Tripathi 2018: 44–49), thanks to the figure of his Hindu patron Shivaji Bhosle (Śivājī Bhomsle), who later on in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was found to be useful to the nationalist agenda in the process of the nationalist historicization of Hindi.<sup>1</sup> The poetical

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the concept of nationalist historicization as one of three stages of modern Hindi's constitution, see Dalmia 1997: 147–148.

treatise *Śivrājbhūṣan* (or *Śivbhūṣan*) was composed in 1673,<sup>2</sup> shortly preceding the royal consecration of Shivaji (1674). The content which can be seen as political history forms one of various topics covered in the poem of at least 347 stanzas.<sup>3</sup> Many of the matters that have been introduced by Bhushan Tripathi are also frequently summoned and discussed by 20<sup>th</sup>-century historians of the Maratha empire and, compared with their works, Bhushan's stanzas appear as a pragmatic representation of his patron's deeds. In order to demonstrate the nature of this representation, I will focus here on a short sequence of events that seems significant for the poem due to the quantitative aspect; it is the main subject of ten stanzas (VB, vv. 33, 74, 135, 169, 179, 186, 191, 242, 252, 292) spread throughout the entire oeuvre. Also, the first stanza on this theme stands for the first illustration of rhetorical figures to be met in the poem in all its available editions and manuscripts. The sequence of events in 1666 leads from Shivaji's visit to Aurangzeb's court until his escape or—according to a single instance that is to be found in the poem—until his journey back home.

Mahendra P. Singh, who analyses a competing representation of the same event in an account by Bhushan's contemporary Kulpati Miśra (Singh 2001), evaluates in modern terms that “[u]ntil this point of time Shivaji was only a regional figure, but after this event he emerged as a national hero” (Singh 2001: 1). Since commissioning *Śivrājbhūṣan* should be perceived as part of the vast preparations for Shivaji's royal consecration, for our poet the significance of such events must have rather relied on a crucial need to position his patron against the superior power of the Mughals. Thus, the notion of national hero should be clearly attributed to 20<sup>th</sup>-century historians of the Maratha empire. Before beginning the analysis of Bhushan's representation, let

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<sup>2</sup> For more details on *Śivrājbhūṣan* and its author, see my other papers: Borek 2015, 2016, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> The number refers to the shortest available edition, Vishvanāth P. Miśra's (VB), the basic source explored in this article.

us draw a general historical background of the events that directly preceded the famous encounter.

After a series of victorious invasions by Shivaji's troops into Mughal territories and unsuccessful attempts to tame him, the coalition led by the ruler of Amber, Rajah Jai Singh (Jai Singh), and supplied from Agra, led to a long-lasting siege of Purandar, one of the key Marathas' fortresses. Shivaji, compelled to sign the agreement (1665), gave away to the Mughal power almost two-thirds of his forts and fortresses. The rest could be kept on his commitment to loyalty and service to the Mughal army. Most of the provisions of this agreement were fully executed within three months, and later on Shivaji's forces became part of the Mughal campaign in South India, against the Sultanate of Bijapur. The success of this expedition earned him robes of honor. However, another Mughal venture, the battle for Panhala (Panhālā) fort in 1666 led by Shivaji, did not turn out that successful and the second most prominent Maratha chief, Netaji (Netājī), eventually sided with the Sultanate of Bijapur. As Jadunath Sarkar concludes from studying the secret correspondence of Jai Singh to Aurangzeb (Sarkar 1920: 151), strengthening bonds with Shivaji became now even more necessary. The ruler of Amber convinced the Maratha leader to attend the Mughal *darbār* in Agra. He must have dispelled Shivaji's concerns about the latter's own safety and lured him with a promise of fruitful negotiations. The leader of Marathas secured the forts and fortresses remaining under his direct power and set out for Agra, where he eventually experienced a harsh disappointment. This is exactly the point where Bhushan starts his account as a, let us call him, contemporary historian.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The analysis of the subsequent portions of Bhushan's poem provided in this article is a significantly modified version of chapter III.2 of my book published in the Polish language (Borek 2019: 162–173).

*milata*<sup>5</sup> *hī kurukha cikattā*<sup>6</sup> *kaum nirakhi kīnau sarajā sāhasa jo ucita*  
*brjarāja kaum /*  
*bhuṣana kai mīsa gairmisala khare kiye kaum kiye mlecchana*  
*murachita karikai garāja kaum /*  
*arataim gusulakhāna bīca aiseṃ umarāva lai cale manāya sivarāja*  
*mahārāja kaum /*  
*lakhi dāvēdāra kau risānau dekhi dularāya jaiseṃ gaṛadāra aṛadāra*  
*gajarāja kaum /*  
 (VB, v. 33)

As soon as the Lion-Headman met the annoyed Chagatai,<sup>7</sup> he showed the courage that befits Krishna;  
 Who has set [me here] as a mere decoration?!—[he] roared and thus made the barbarians faint.  
 The noblemen who stayed in the Bathhouse<sup>8</sup> began to convince Maharaja Shivaji [to be quiet],  
 Seeing the rage of the claimant [was] like looking at a powerful elephant coaxed by a mahout.

The very same event has received notable attention in modern historical texts. For instance, two great historians of the Maratha empire, Jadunath Sarkar and Stewart Gordon, provide parallel accounts of the famous visit of Shivaji in Agra in 1666 (see e.g., Gordon 1993: 77–78, Sarkar 1920: 152–162). According to their narratives, Shivaji

<sup>5</sup> In the process of critical reading, the word *malata* has been emended on the basis of the correspondent v. 34 in Śyāmbihārī Miśra's edition (ŚB).

<sup>6</sup> The word *cakattā* has been emended here on the basis of the correspondent v. 34 in ŚB edition and v. 32 in the manuscript (MS).

<sup>7</sup> In the entire poem, the Lion-Headman (*sarjā*—headman, chief, lion, tiger) is synonymous with Shivaji. Various contexts leave no doubt that the name Chagatai, otherwise referring to people in history who claimed themselves descendants of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Mongol Empire, should be reserved here exclusively for Aurangzeb.

<sup>8</sup> The word *gusulakhāna* translated according to the meanings drawn from dictionaries of Hindi, Urdu and Persian (see respectively *guslakhānā* in HSS: 1321, *gusl-xānā* in OHED: 271 and Platts 1884: 771, *gusul-xānā* in Steingass 1892: 888) as a bathhouse, denotes probably an audience room. An argument supporting my presumption can be found in a Rajasthani letter by Parkaldas, who provides another account of the events in Agra (see Singh 2001: 104–105).

must have felt humiliated as he was ordered to stand in the third row, next to *pañc-hazārī* commandants, much lower in rank than him, and behind other commanders (*mansabdār*) of Aurangzeb's army. He considered this as an insult and an inferior treatment. He rebelled and thus ignited a huge stir at the court in Agra. This part of their accounts remains in line with the poetical representation that can be found in most of Bhushan's stanzas devoted to the event.

The most meaningful discrepancy between modern reconstructions and Bhushan's relation lies in the object of victimization. The poet focused on the Lion-Headman's anger, symptomized by an untamable roar that made the barbarians (*mlecchana*)<sup>9</sup> faint. Interestingly, J. Sarkar explicitly states that it was Shivaji who lost consciousness, though with the help of appropriate sources he justifies the behavior which might be somewhat unfavorable to the image of the great hero:

Stung to fury by what he considered a public humiliation, Shivaji expostulated with Ram Singh<sup>10</sup> in a high tone, and even wanted to commit suicide rather than outlive such a shame. Ram Singh, alarmed at this unexpected development and the breach of Court etiquette caused by Shiva[ji]'s loud voice and violent gestures, tried his best to pacify him, but in vain. Swelling with suppressed anger and fretting within himself in bitterness or mortification, Shivaji felt down in a swoon. (Sarkar 1920: 159–160)

A slightly different narration, nevertheless close to Sarkar's, has been offered by Gordon. He describes Shivaji's reaction to Aurangzeb's insufficient concern with his person as follows:

Shivaji was brought forward in the audience and gave one thousand gold mohars and two thousand silver rupees as expected presents

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<sup>9</sup> A frequent use of this term in *Śivrajbhūṣan* is simultaneously being linked to, usually Muslim, opponents to Shivaji's political and martial powers.

<sup>10</sup> Ram Singh (Rām Sirnh), Rajah Jai Singh's son, was sent with Shivaji to Agra.



to the emperor. The emperor neither spoke to him nor acknowledged his presence. Shivaji was then made to stand with relatively low-ranked nobles. He made a scene, refused the honorary robes offered to him, and stalked out of the audience hall. Except for the intercession of a powerful noble, Shivaji and his son would have been killed within days. Even with a high noble's surety bond for his good behavior, Shivaji was confined to his house while factions attempted to influence the emperor's decision regarding his future. (Gordon 1993: 77–78)

For Gordon, the image of this incident in Agra is a perfect illustration of the difference in Aurangzeb's and Shivaji's perceptions of the latter's actual military and political positions.

In fact, an interesting discrepancy among the three narratives cited above can be noticed. If we reduce the comparison to the nature of the agency attributed to Maratha's leader, we notice that only the first account—which is so far the only contemporary one—depicts the enraged Shivaji as a strong and independent individual. Even if he is difficult to deal with, this is a consequence of his high status. It has been expressed twofold: 1) literarily, Shivaji needs to be convinced, persuaded or conciliated if not actually propitiated, and this can be felt in the original text upon the encounter of the verb *manāya*; 2) figuratively, by a conventional comparison to a powerful or high breed elephant, an element welcome in the high-ornate neoclassical poetry drawing on Sanskrit *kāvya*'s resources (see e.g. Edgerton 1931). In both other texts Shivaji becomes noticeably weaker as he either swoons or requires somebody else's support. The greater agency attributed to Shivaji in Bhushan's contemporary text is noteworthy not only in comparison to the modern accounts by Sarkar and Gordon, but also in relation to another contemporary account of the incident. Thus, Kulpati Miśra in *Sevā dī vār* convinces his audience that Shivaji was saved only thanks to Ram Singh. Such an assertion must have been the result of a political decision, since Jai Singh's son was most probably Kulpati Miśra's patron at that moment (Singh 2001: 203–204). The poet does not suggest any bad disposition or weakness on Shivaji's part

(Singh 2001: 203); however, if one acknowledges that Ram Singh was obliged by his father to guarantee Shivaji's safe stay at Aurangzeb's court, it certainly influences our understanding of the text. Shivaji, afraid of going there and convinced by Jai Singh to participate in the Mughal *darbār*, could have understood the developments as a result of a planned attempt against himself. I may conclude here with a question: was *Sevā dī vār* Ram Singh's insurance policy after Shivaji's escape from Agra?

By no means should one expect in a 17<sup>th</sup>-century poem produced in India the ideal of objectivity prescribed to the historian in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe by Leopold von Ranke. The patron's self-interest must have been the main reason influencing the way the poet shaped most of the images, also the one of Shivaji's flight from Agra. It is not only three other authors who essentially agree among themselves that the Maratha leader escaped from there. Bhushan also does not hide it throughout most of his work. However, in one stanza he offers a slightly different account, constantly attributing to his patron the right and power to make his own decisions:

*āvata gosalkhāne aiseṁ kachū tyaura ṭhāne jānau avaraṅgahū  
ke prānana kau leva hai /  
rasa-khoṭa bhae teṁ agoṭa āgare mauṁ sātauṁ caukī nāṁghi āya  
ghara karī hada revā hai /  
bhūṣana bhanata mahī cahaṁ cakka cāha kiyau pātasāha cikkāta  
kī chātī māha chevā hai /  
jāna na parata aiseṁ kāma hai karata koṁ gandharaba devā hai  
kai siddha hai kai sevā hai /  
(VB, v. 74)*

Approaching the Bathhouse he casts such a glance as if he were going to take Aurangzeb's breath.

Disgusted with his own sojourn in Agra, he leapt over the seven outposts, arrived home and set the border on Narmada.

Bhushan says: he desired all directions of the Earth and thus wounded Chagatai emperor's heart. There is no way to learn who does such things—is it Gandharva or god, *siddha* or Shiva[ji]?

The first line (VB, v. 74), read along with the previously quoted stanza (VB, v. 33), reveals the poet's insistence on presenting the agency of the leader's image in front of the emperor. In the second line (VB, v. 74), by stating Shivaji's disgust with his stay at the court, he makes it even clearer and zooms out of a single event towards a wider history of Marathas' empire. None of the information provided here goes against the narratives of the professional 20<sup>th</sup>-century historians. Moreover, this short account contained in the first half of the stanza maintains chronological accuracy, which is to be frequently observed in *Śivrājbhūṣan*. But these are not only credibility and chronology that bring Bhushan's relation close to the basic premises of what we consider to be professional history writing. A sudden zoom out of one event toward a wider territorial success suggests a certain cause and effect relationship. Then, the third line (VB, v. 74) is focused on Shivaji's ambitions and thus it forms a statement which provides a historical explication of Shivaji's success. Aurangzeb's disappointment or his "wounded (...) heart" (VB, v. 74) may refer here to two things:

- 1) Shivaji's further military and political success;
- 2) the ambition manifested in his arrogant attitude or claim expressed at the *darbār*.

Sarkar in *Shivaji and his times* comes to a conclusion that the emperor felt lifelong regret because of what Shivaji's escape meant to him afterwards. He quoted a version of Aurangzeb's last will in which the latter attested that a minor negligence or carelessness resulted in "the flight of the wretch Shivaji", which led to years of distracting campaigns (Sarkar 1920: 174). Bhushan does not make a similar statement as his poem had been composed more than three decades before Aurangzeb's death. However, in light of the posterior source quoted by Sarkar (i.e., Aurangzeb's will), the poet's account seems more credible to the Western reader suspicious of the historical value of high-style poetry.

Another stanza by Bhushan also suggests that the emperor must have expressed deep concern about the situation before 1673 or the date of composition of *Śivrājbhūṣan*:

*pañca-hajārāna bīca kharā kiyā maiṃ usa[ ]kā kucha bheda na pāyā/  
bhūṣana toṃ kahi aurangajeba ujīrana soṃ behisāba risāyā/  
kammara kī na kaṭārī daī isa nāma ne gosalakhānā bacāyā/  
jora sivā karatā anaraththa bhalī bhaī haththa hathyāra na āyā/  
(VB, v. 191)*

I cannot comprehend why you (or: I) made him stand among  
*pañc-hazārī* [commandants]!

[According to] Bhushan, this is what immeasurably enraged  
Aurangzeb says to [his] ministers.

The Bathhouse has been saved only because Shivaji was not allowed  
[his] dagger.

He would use force! How fortunate it is that he had no weapons at hand!

On which sources Bhushan based the factual content of this stanza we do not know.<sup>11</sup> Still, it would be hasty to suggest that the poet merely forged Aurangzeb's words to give free rein to his own imagination. At the minimum, he could have concocted them in order to relate a historical "truth" more relevant for the Marathas' new dominium than for the authority of the Mughal Empire. Had we had no other historical narrative confirming Aurangzeb's regret, we would not be eager to believe Bhushan. And this is mostly because history in a form of ornate poetry is generally not considered history in our terms. Besides, it is also worth noticing that our poet quoted the Mughal Emperor several times and he did so in an anecdotal form. When reading different parts of the poem, it is hard to overcome a strong impression that whatever Aurangzeb says is either incredible or just funny (see e.g. VB, vv. 84, 86). But the audience at the court—since we talk about 17<sup>th</sup>-century courtly poetry, probably still performed on a much higher scale than circulated in the form of manuscripts—must have expected not only a mere aesthetic experience,

<sup>11</sup> According to a single stanza (ŚB, v. 29), which is to be found only in some editions of the text (it is not in VB and MS, the main sources used in this article), Bhushan might have even been an eye-witness of Shivaji's deeds. For a translation and a comment on this verse, see Borek 2015: 42–43.

but also entertainment. Facts, if they were to be included in the poem, could not be separated from the poetical figures that were tools to fulfil audience's manifold expectations.

Most evidently, the history exposed here by Bhushan was governed by the political ideology of the new dominium at the time of its dynamic rise to power. The poem as a whole provides multiple arguments supporting the assumption that elevating the status of Shivaji and seeking ultimate recognition for his rule in the complex geopolitical arena of 17<sup>th</sup>-century India must have been fundamental for the poet's literary agenda. For a conclusion, let us observe one more such example in which Bhushan instrumentally used the history of famous encounter at the *darbār*:

*bīra*<sup>12</sup> *baṛe-baṛe bhīra paṭhāna kharo rajapūtana ko gana bhārau /*  
*bhūṣana āi tahām sivasāha liyau hari auramgasāha ko gārau /*  
*dīnau kujvāba dilīsa kom yawm ju ḍaryau saba gosalakhāno ḍarārau /*  
*nāyau na māthahi dacchinanātha na sātha meṁ saina na hātha*  
*hathyārau /*  
 (VB, w. 169)

The greatest heroes standing in the crowd, Pashtuns and cluster of eminent Rajputs!

King Shivaji joined [them] and belittled Aurangzeb's pride—  
 Bhushan [says].

Vehemently incensed, he expostulated against the lord of Delhi,  
 so everyone in the Bathhouse got scared.

The lord of the South did not bow [though] he had no army  
 [with him], no weapon in hand!<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The initial letter *ra* has been emended here to *bīra* on the basis of the correspondent verse of the manuscript (MS).

<sup>13</sup> As the reader might have noticed, previously quoted stanzas (VB, vv. 33, 74, 191) were meagre in any references to mythical or religious themes, though Bhushan usually makes ample use of them throughout his oeuvre, regardless of whether he covers history or discusses other issues. The last passage presented in this paper (VB, v. 169) is completely devoid of such references. For many Western readers it can be misleading as they may still look for history in portions cleared of the apparently mythical layer. A close-reading of this poem permits one

This static picture of the audience hall eventually becomes animated only through the agency of the hero. In the last verse, literal to such a point that it does not resemble much high-style poetry, Shivaji does not bow even to the supreme political power. Taken out of the context of the other stanzas devoted to the same event, we may read it just as an unlikely or at least exaggerated image, a construction of a new myth, and by no means a representation of the past. In fact, this stanza can be read as an example of a deeply political use of history concerning an event related in other portions of the poem.

As Hayden White has proven in his analyses of historiographical texts, the narrative is never free from ideology. Following Karl Mannheim, he states that

(...) ideologies could be classified according to whether they were “situationally congruent” (i.e., generally accepting of the social status quo) or “situationally transcendent” (i.e., critical of the status quo and oriented towards its transformation and dissolution). (White 1998: 167)

The presence of ideology in *Śivrājbhūṣan* appears as a feature common for both courtly Braj poetry and what we consider today as professional historical narratives. Among many issues that make both types of registering the past different from each other is that in those of Western origin the ideology was either not intended by authors or not suitable with the ideals shared by professional historians. Still, it was present. In Bhushan’s 1673 poem, much earlier than professional history theorized by von Ranke and criticized by White, one certainly observes that a situationally transcendent ideology is manifest. Moreover, it appears to be part of the author’s agenda constituted within institutional frames. Is this an argument enough to consider

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to formulate a preliminary assumption that the presence of such a layer is no tool at all for the discernment of history. However, this observation needs to become a subject of a separate discussion.

a high-style *rīti* poem a lower quality type of history-writing than prose productions? In no case do I mean to diminish the value of the latter or to suggest that the irreducible ideological background makes their credibility equal to Bhushan's poetry. Contrariwise, Sarkar's and Gordon's narrations served to me as minimal sources of validation of the historical value of *Śivṛājbhūṣan*. We may be unable to trace the sifting of sources in early modern modes of recording the past, whilst it is possible in the case of academic history. But this again cannot serve as an argument to discredit historical sense embedded in Indian intellectual traditions. Not only because Bhushan relates contemporary history, which makes its nature utterly different than 20<sup>th</sup>-century narrations on 17<sup>th</sup>-century events, but mainly because the most current and accepted forms of composition in Braj courtly literary culture and contemporary Western or Western-oriented world were dissimilar. What may be the most misleading for us today in perceiving the value of Bhushan-like poets for historical knowledge is an ostensible lack of distinction between eulogy and historiography in poetry. But this, as I believe, is due to an insistent Eurocentric presupposition that history is and can be written only as a separate, one-purpose composition.

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